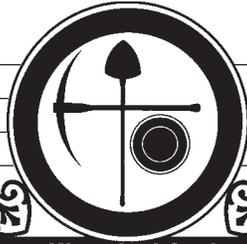


This month's theme:
The Spanish Flu



Contents

Feature	1	Fun page	3
Next month	4		

The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society's Junior Historian Program

PROSPECTOR

April, 2005



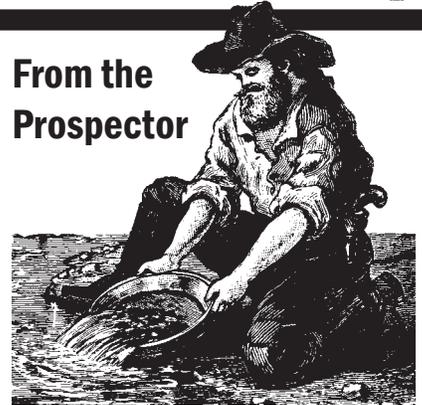
The Spanish Flu

Everybody gets sick from time to time, but back in the fall of 1918 a lot of people from around the world got sick at the same time. That year, there was a world wide influenza outbreak, what scientists call a "pandemic." Historians and scientists are not really sure where this nasty strain of the flu first began but since the first cases were reported in Spain it was called the "Spanish Flu." From Spain it quickly traveled around the globe causing a lot of people to get sick and lots of people to take action against getting sick.

In 1918, World War I was coming to an end and all the soldiers that had gone overseas were heading home. They were going back to their families all over Europe and America, including right here in Idaho. Unfortunately, many of them had come down with the Spanish Flu and they brought it home with them. Back in 1918 knowledge about how the flu was spread from one person to another was not as clear as it is today. People didn't wash their hands

Continued on page 2

From the Prospector



Howdy Prospectors !

I hope you'll excuse me if I was a bit slow with this month's issue. For the last week I've had the worst cold west of the Mississippi. With all the coughing, and sneezing, and shivering I haven't been able to do anything but stay in bed. Luckily, my mule makes a great bowl of chicken soup.

People say that it's best to write about subjects that you are familiar with. So, this month, I thought I'd write about the great flu outbreak of 1918. This little virus was a whopper. It didn't just affect people in Idaho, people all over the planet got sick!

Enjoy this month's fascinating story of the Spanish Flu in Idaho.

as often as they should and germs spread much faster and made more people sick.

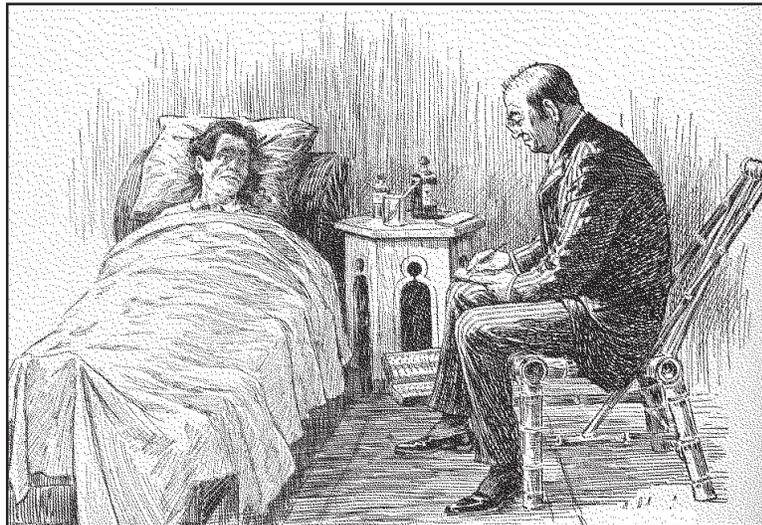
Here in Idaho, many of the towns tried to prevent the spread of the flu by closing down places where people gathered in crowds. This meant that some of the theaters, shops, and restaurants were shut down. In addition, city officials asked people to wear cotton gauze masks, like the kind doctors and nurses wear, whenever they left their houses. The masks were uncomfortably hot and hard to breathe in. But, because the flu is often spread through sneezing and coughing, this was probably one of the best ways to control the spread of the disease.

In October of 1918, some city officials in Southern and Central Idaho decided to close the public schools as a way to stop the flu from spreading further. This break lasted anywhere from one week up to five months in some places. It was like an early Thanksgiving vacation for some student, but for the kids who were sick it wasn't much fun.

In Twin Falls the popular Laving Theater was closed for nearly five months and so were many area churches. Authorities in Twin Falls, Idaho Falls, and other places were worried that the flu would be more easily spread in crowded places. They were right about that, the flu is very contagious and anyone who is sick with influenza should stay home and rest. Looking back on it now it's easy to see that the closing of schools, churches and businesses probably wasn't necessary. But in

1918 and influenza the way influenza spread was still a medical mystery.

In 1918, the hospitals were not as big as they are today. A lot of smaller towns in the country didn't even have hospitals or doctors. Many of these people had to travel along way to see a doctor or a doctor had to go see them, often on horseback. Very few people owned cars back then so just to travel a few miles could take a day or longer. In the larger towns and cities, such as Twin Falls, the hospital became overcrowded with sick people so they had to find other places to put them. Since the



schools and churches were already closed, city officials decided to turn these buildings into makeshift hospitals. In many places, healthy people from the community had to become temporary nurses and help all of the new patients.

Some communities might have tried to isolate themselves a little too much in order to stop the flu from coming to their town. For example, officials in the town of Challis decided to post armed guards at either end of the town in order to keep strangers out and the towns-

people in. This made some people mad who needed to travel through Challis to get to other places. It also angered business people who bought and sold things to people in Challis. Eventually Governor Alexander had to step in and tell Challis officials let officials from other towns into and out of Challis.

By Thanksgiving of 1918 most people around Southern Idaho were getting pretty restless. With theaters and churches and meeting halls closed, and kids not in school, boredom started to set in. Everyone wanted to see a movie or go dancing and parents were concerned

about their children missing more school. In the beginning of December, a few city officials decided to reopen the schools and businesses. Small outbreaks of the flu continued here and there in local areas so many schools, churches, and businesses stayed closed until after the New Year. This meant that annual public Christmas celebrations had to be canceled in some places around Idaho, but people still celebrated at home with friends and neighbors.

Finally, in the spring of 1919 the number of new flu cases dropped off and the Influenza Pandemic of 1918 was soon a thing of the past. Although many people quickly forgot about the horrible year, many doctors today still study the spread of the Spanish Flu. By studying this past pandemic, we might be able to better prepare ourselves for future disease outbreaks. History is a subject that never gets old because it always has something new to



Next Month's Activities

For the May issue this year we'd like to try something different, but we need your help. For the last issue of the year we'd like to have a local history theme. Since there are Prospector chapters all across the state, we were hoping each class would write a short history of their school, town, an important local person, or interesting past event that happened nearby. We'd then print as many of these as we can in the May issue.

Send in your work by May 11th to:

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610 North Julia Davis Drive
Boise, ID 83702

or email it to us at
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